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ABSTRACT

This bulletin aims to provide guidance to business companies in developing an employee volunteer literacy program in which employees volunteer their time to assist in such aspects of community adult literacy campaigns as advocacy, public relations, fundraising, community leadership, and tutoring. A section on assessing local community needs discusses eight sources of assistance in locating information about local needs, and suggests specific questions the company should explore, such as capacities in which volunteers are needed and can work in local programs, staff and physical resources needed, local approaches to volunteer management, and the experience of other companies involved in adult literacy programming in the community. Ten questions to consider in evaluating individual company resources are provided in the next section. The third section, which is intended to illustrate some successful program models, describes selected on-site tutoring projects (sponsored by New York Life and McGraw-Hill), off-site projects (Grumman Corporation and Colonial Bank of Connecticut), and recruitment-only projects (Rohm and Haas and Sperry Corporation). Discussed in a section on program design are day-to-day management, facility selection, ways of supporting volunteers, recruitment and referral, tutor training, training materials, student recruitment, and diagnosis and assessment. The importance of strong, visible, and continued support from top management and interested and qualified staff to coordinate and monitor the program is stressed. A discussion of the benefits to a company to be derived from organizing an employee volunteer program concludes the guide. (MN)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Developing An Employee Volunteer Literacy Program

Businesses can help combat adult illiteracy in many ways: by taking part in state and urban planning activities...speaking out as community leaders...providing basic skills services to their own employees...making grants and giving in-kind assistance to literacy organizations at the local, state, and national levels...and pressing for more public support of the field.

One of the most useful forms of in-kind help is a program in which employees volunteer their time to assist basic skills programs in their communities. Corporate volunteerism came into its own in the 1970s when companies began to see volunteer participation as a legitimate expression of social responsibility. Since then, nonprofit organizations--literacy organizations among them--have looked to companies as a good source of potential volunteers. As a result, volunteers have become an increasingly important part of the answer for educationally disadvantaged adults in need of basic skills instruction and for literacy programs in need of human resources. Employee volunteers can fill a wide variety of essential roles--in advocacy, public relations, fundraising, community leadership, and tutoring in one-to-one and small group settings--all areas of need for most literacy programs.

More and more companies have been asking BCEL for guidance on how to develop employee volunteer literacy programs. This Bulletin aims to provide that guidance--giving practical information on the issues to consider, the various program approaches a company can take, and how to implement and sustain the program model chosen. (Dozens of companies and literacy programs were consulted in the process of developing this Bulletin. BCEL is grateful for their advice and cooperation. The basic research for the Bulletin was done by BCEL Research Associate, Dianne Kangisser.)

A. Getting Started: Assessing Your Community's Needs

Before launching an employee volunteer literacy program, some basic groundwork will need to be done. This will take from a few hours to a few weeks overall, depending on how complex your community is and whether you

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assign a staff member to the task or bring in an outside expert who already knows the local literacy environment. An outside expert can probably do the job faster but will have to be compensated.

Your first step will be to conduct a needs assessment of the community in which your company or branch operates. Your staff member or consultant should be asked to identify the adult basic skills programs serving your geographic area and to look at their needs and resources. The goal is to be sure that you have a good understanding of what your literacy program choices are, based on an evaluation of their potential as partners.

Among the specific questions to explore are these: Where are the groups you identify located? How do they operate? How long have they been in operation? Are they known in the community and do they have a good track record? What specific needs do they have where voluntary help would make the difference? In what capacities would your company's volunteers be used? What staff and physical resources can the programs contribute to the partnership you might establish with them? What approach to volunteer management do the programs take? Are any other companies involved with the programs and what experiences have those companies had in their partnerships?

Information can be obtained from many sources to assist you in answering these questions, and you should probably consult with more than one of them. They are:

1. The local or state affiliates of Literacy Volunteers of America and/or Laubach Literacy Action--the two national voluntary literacy organizations. If no local or state offices exist, contact the national offices directly:

   Literacy Volunteers of America
   Widewaters 1
   5795 Widewaters Parkway
   Syracuse, N.Y. 13214
   315-445-8000

   Laubach Literacy Action
   1320 Jamesville Avenue
   Syracuse, N.Y. 13210
   315-422-9121

2. Your local school district, which may administer an adult basic education program, and/or the adult and continuing education unit of your state education department.

3. The local library and/or State Library Office.

4. Your statewide or urban literacy planning body. (BCEL's State Directory of Key Contact Persons may be helpful in identifying such groups and is available prepaid for $5 a copy.)

5. The Association for Community Based Education
   1806 Vernon Street, N.W.
   Washington, D.C. 20009
   202-462-6333

6. Your local Voluntary Action Center.

7. Your local churches.

8. The CONTACT Literacy Center in Nebraska, a national telephone referral service with extensive ties to literacy programs throughout the country.
   800-228-8813

If this process of exploration confirms that an employee volunteer literacy program would, in fact, meet a community need by enabling one or more literacy providers to improve or expand their service, the next step is to decide tentatively with which of the groups examined you might want to work. At this point, we suggest that you meet with any groups of possible interest or invite them in to make a presentation so that you can get to know about them first-hand. It will be important to keep in mind that actually training volunteers to teach reading and writing or to work in other capacities requires professional expertise. Your company can elect to hire its own staff to perform this function, though this will probably not be practical in most cases. Your potential partner(s) will in most cases already have the needed expertise and experience.

B. The Next Step: Evaluating Your Company's Resources

Before making an actual choice of partner(s) or going further with your explorations, an internal assessment should take place. It will be crucial at this point to decide how serious your company is about the effort because the extent of your commitment will affect not only your choice of a literacy partner or partners but the type of program you can implement. The basic issue to consider is to what degree human, financial, and physical resources can be made available by your company. The following questions can serve as a guide in considering this issue. Staff of the literacy programs in which you are interested can help answer many of the questions, but some can be answered only internally.

- Is your company prepared to assign staff that will be needed to direct, coordinate, and monitor the employee volunteer program and to serve as the on-going liaison with the literacy partner?

- What kinds of skills will these staff members need to have?

- What departments in your company will have to be involved (training? personnel? public relations?), and how will their activities be coordinated?

- Does your company have a large enough workforce to make volunteer recruitment worthwhile? On a one-time basis? On a continuing basis?

- Will employees be given full or partial released time for their volunteer work?

- What will it cost to recruit, train, and support the literacy volunteers, and to plan and manage the program?

- How much of the cost is your company willing or able to assume?

- If necessary, could your company provide some financial support to your (nonprofit) literacy partner (which may incur personnel and material costs it cannot otherwise afford in developing and carrying out the partnership)?

- Do you have appropriate space available to accommodate on-site tutoring that your literacy partner might wish to provide? If so, are there internal security issues to be considered?

- In an on-site program, is the company accessible to students that will be served? In programs where employees must go to the provider organizations, are those organizations within easy reach?

C. Program Models To Consider

There are basically three program approaches you can take and these are described below. Each requires a different level of commitment and company resources. You will need to thoroughly consider these models, as well as the issues and questions posed above, before you can decide which approach is best for you and which external group(s) to select as your partner(s). It should be noted that the smaller a company is, the less likely it is to have the resources to support a program requiring extensive involvement. Thus, in considering the models given below, you might keep in mind that some companies will do better to start small and then grow into a larger effort if their experience warrants it.

1. ON-SITE TUTORING PROJECT. In this option, which takes the greatest degree of company involvement and commitment, all of the activities of the program will take place on company premises, including the instruction of students. The employee volunteers will be recruited by your company to tutor or perform other tasks. They will be trained at the company, almost always by your external literacy providing group(s), and they will engage in their volunteer work in space allocated within the company. Students will come to the company to receive their instruction.

New York Life Insurance Company (NYL) and McGraw-Hill, Inc. are good models of on-site programs. Both are located in New York City where the public transportation system allows students from any borough easy access to mid-town Manhattan. The NYL program has been operating since 1975; McGraw-Hill's program began in 1985. Presently, the literacy partner in both cases is Literacy Volunteers of New York City (LV-NYC).

a. New York Life: This program evolved out of an ongoing relationship between LV-NYC and the company's contributions program. It was the company's first foray into a long-term volunteer effort. Volunteers are recruited by word of mouth and notices posted in the company cafeteria. They are trained, matched with students, and supervised by LV-NYC. The program has recently been expanded from two to three nights a week. Over the years some 200 NYL employees have taken part in the program, some remaining volunteers for many years. A few years ago the program was opened to non-employee volunteers--people who live and work in the company's immediate vicinity. The LV-NYC program had grown to the point where volunteers were needed beyond those available from the company's pool of interested employees, and NYL saw this as a creative way to further assist the program. Several factors have contributed to the program's success and endurance: NYL provides generous financial support to LV-NYC; an NYL staff member serves as the liaison to LV-NYC and monitors the project; and the effort enjoys top management support. (For further information, contact: Carol Reuter, Assistant Vice President, New York Life Insurance Company, 51 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010, 212-576-7341.)

b. McGraw-Hill: This program was initiated by senior management and implemented by the Public Affairs Department in conjunction with the Human Resources Department. A literacy consultant was brought in at the outset to help with assessment and planning, and a Public Affairs staff member was assigned responsibility for developing and overseeing the program. Through a desk-to-desk flyer, employees were invited to a noon-time orientation which included remarks by the Chairman of the Board and a question-and-answer period with a panel of representatives from three programs with substantial literacy services--Literacy Volunteers of New York City (LV-NYC), The Fortune Society, and Jobs for Youth. Employees interested in The Fortune Society and Jobs for Youth were trained at those organizations because the nature of their training required that. For those interested in LV-NYC, training was given on-site at McGraw-Hill in preparation for tutoring at various LV-NYC external tutoring sites. Six months later, when LV-NYC approached the company with a need for another mid-town tutoring site, it was decided to open the building to both tutoring and training, with LV-NYC instruction to be held in the McGraw-Hill cafeteria. Employee interest was high and this arrangement--which requires the involvement of the food services, building maintenance, and security staffs--makes it easier for employees to take part. Every six months, the volunteers are brought together by the company to see how they are doing and to lay the groundwork for the next orientation session. In addition to its on-site program, McGraw-Hill also keeps informed about other basic skills programs in the city in need of volunteer help and makes employee referrals to them. (For further information, contact: Kathleen Leonard, Public Affairs Department, McGraw-Hill, 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10020, 212-512-6480.)

As noted above, one of the major considerations in running an on-site program is that of security. In addition to your own employees, students, staff from external providing organizations, and sometimes community volunteers would all need access to your premises. At NYL potential security problems have been avoided by holding classes on the ground floor of a building that is not security-sensitive, and guards are present at all times. No special identification is needed by program participants as would be required at other NYL sites. Tutoring at McGraw-Hill takes place below ground level and has required no extra security measures beyond alerting the usual guards stationed on the main floor about the tutoring activity.

2. OFF-SITE PROJECT. In this approach, the actual instruction does not take place at the company site but other activities relating to the program do. Recruitment remains a company responsibility. The volunteers are oriented and trained at the company. Volunteer recognition functions may be hosted on company premises. But once the volunteers are trained they become part of the staff of the partner's organization and go to that organization to carry out their work.

Grumman Corporation on Long Island and Colonial Bank of Connecticut have model off-site programs:

a. Grumman: This pilot project was initiated by the Office of Community Support Programs with approval of the Employee Contributions Council. Grumman became interested in engaging its employees (the company has a workforce of 30,000) in a voluntary activity, decided on literacy, and considered a range of community partners. LV-Nassau County was selected. The Manager of Community Support Programs serves as project coordinator and liaison to LV and handles all matters pertaining to recruitment, space for training, refreshments, and volunteer recognition. She also orchestrates the involvement of other departments, including training, placement, and supervision functions. Employees tutor at locations in the community that are convenient for themselves and their students--libraries, churches, private homes. (For further information, contact: Sharon Grosser, Manager of Community Support Programs, Grumman Corporation, Bethpage, N.Y. 11714, 516-575-3254.)

b. Colonial Bank of Connecticut: This program was initiated three years ago by the Corporate Social Responsibility Committee (which administers the company's contributions budget). LV of Connecticut (LVC) was selected as the literacy partner because it has affiliate programs located in many of the communities where the bank operates. Top management not only approved the program, but addressed a group of several hundred senior officers to outline their plans and introduce LVC. Volunteers are recruited through articles in internal publications and trained on the premises by LVC. Trained volunteers serve as the bank's branch coordinators to the local LVC affiliates, each reporting back to the vice president in charge. Volunteer recognition parties are hosted by the president and other senior officers for employees who complete the

tutor training. (For further information, contact: David Beatty, Vice President, Consumer and Community Affairs, Colonial Bank, Waterbury, CT 06720, 203-574-7265.)

3. RECRUITMENT ONLY. This final approach is the least complicated, usually requiring only minimal direct involvement by the company. It consists of recruiting and referring company employees to one or more literacy programs in your community. Recruitment can be done on a one-time basis or on an ongoing basis, depending on the size of your workforce and whether your company recruits for other kinds of voluntary projects as well. The methods used to publicize the illiteracy problem and to generate employee interest in volunteering can be quite varied--from articles in in-house publications, to notices posted on bulletin boards or placed in employee paychecks, to volunteer fairs and other activities.

Rohm and Haas in Philadelphia and Sperry Corporation in St. Paul are good examples of local recruitment programs, each requiring only minimal company involvement. B. Dalton Bookseller's program is a model national effort, involving its bookstore managers countrywide.

a. Rohm and Haas: Some months ago the company launched an organization-wide information program on illiteracy to raise the consciousness of its workforce to the illiteracy problem. An awareness brochure was developed, listing several ways that employees could get involved. This was followed by inviting the staff to attend a meeting where the directors of local adult literacy programs made presentations. As a result, many employees are now serving as volunteer tutors in area programs. (For more information, contact: Joseph O'Donnell, Jr., Manager, Community Programs, Rohm and Haas, Independence Mall West, Philadelphia, PA 19105, 215-592-3607.)

b. Sperry Corporation: Over 450 retirees of the Sperry Corporation in St. Paul participate in the Sperry VIP Club. This social club for retirees has a volunteer committee that selects and promotes among its membership community organizations needing volunteer assistance. At the Club's initiative, the Minneapolis Literacy Project (MLP), a local volunteer literacy provider, recently made a presentation to members. Since then, several Club members have been recruited as potential tutors. They are being trained by MLP to tutor at one of its sites in the community. (For further information, contact: Al Mueller, Board Member, Sperry VIP Club, 9201 Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55420, 612-888-9888; or Jean Greener, Director, Minneapolis Literacy Project, 2539 Pleasant Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55404, 612-872-8811.)

c. B. Dalton: One goal of B. Dalton's national literacy initiative (which includes a $3 million grant program) is to encourage and support the participation of company employees nationwide in voluntary community-based literacy programs. In 1984, all B. Dalton store managers were sent a packet of information on the company's program, which included suggestions on how they could work with local programs. Information materials are sent each

month to all stores to keep them up on the overall initiative. So far, more than 500 employees have volunteered in some capacity for adult and youth literacy programs, and nearly 100 employees are serving on the boards of various local literacy organizations. The company's headquarters provides information to the managers of its 780 stores on the literacy problem and how to contact and work with programs in their communities. Local programs, in turn, send workshop information to the stores which is then posted. B. Dalton's general office staff in Minneapolis is notified of the opportunity to participate in the initiative through publication of all tutor training workshop dates in the weekly employee newsletter. Also, a workshop is sponsored at the corporate office once a year. Employees are encouraged to become volunteer tutors. Tutor training material costs for employees and their immediate families are paid by the company. (For more information, contact: Jean Hammink, Literacy Specialist, B. Dalton Bookseller, 7505 Metro Boulevard, Minneapolis, MN 55435, 612-893-7600.)

D. Designing Your Program

Once you have completed the assessment and evaluation steps indicated above, and considered the program approaches you might take, you will be ready to select one or more community programs as your literacy partner(s). When that decision has been made, you will need to meet in a detailed working session with the director(s) of the program(s) to decide who will have responsibility for what. Specific responsibilities should be assigned either to the company or to your literacy partner(s) depending on which organization is best equipped to handle the essential tasks and which program approach you have decided on. The following list of questions can serve as a guide:

- Day-To-Day Management: Who will direct and oversee the program and who (from the company and the external literacy program) will handle day-to-day liaison?

- Selection Of Facility: Where will tutoring take place? On-site or off? Who will make the arrangements?

- Supporting The Volunteers: Who will be responsible for establishing and maintaining support services that your employees will need? More specifically, in-service training gives volunteers new skills and a need to share their experiences. Who will organize and carry out the system for making this possible? The volunteers will need supervision. Who will provide this supervision and be responsible for handling any problems that arise? Volunteers need recognition for their services. How will they be given this recognition and by whom?

- Recruitment & Referral: How will your volunteer employees be recruited and channeled to the literacy program(s)?

- Tutor Training: How will the volunteers be trained, by whom, and where? How long will it take? (If the volunteers are to be used in

non-tutoring roles, what training will be needed and how will it be provided?)

- Training Materials: Specially-designed materials are used to train literacy volunteers. Who will provide them?

- Recruiting Students: How will adult non-readers be selected and matched with the volunteer tutors?

- Diagnosis & Assessment: Pre- and post-achievement tests will need to be administered to measure reading gains. Who will administer these tests and keep records on student progress?

E. Keys To Success

Whatever direction your company decides to take with its volunteer literacy program, there is a consensus among companies currently engaged in volunteer literacy work that two ingredients are essential to success:

- Strong, visible, and continuing support from top management; and

- Interested and qualified staff to coordinate and monitor the program.

It is not necessary for the program to be initiated by top management, but it is important that they strongly endorse it and give sustained support to it whatever its form or duration. Senior management support stimulates the cooperation of middle managers and is the best possible force for motivating employees to participate. Like other company goals, volunteerism needs to be promoted at all levels.

The importance of assigning interested and qualified staff to coordinate and monitor the program cannot be stressed enough. Internally, regardless of the program approach taken, a number of different departments in your company will probably need to be involved and your coordinator should be able to communicate effectively with them and to ensure harmony in their collaboration. Good communication skills will also be needed to deal well with the employee volunteers and with top management who will need to be kept informed.

F. A Final Note

Your company can benefit in at least three ways from an employee volunteer literacy program:

- It will be perceived in the community (and by your employees) as socially-concerned and involved, generating much good will for the company and its products and services.

- Your literacy program partners will be able to increase their service to needy members of your community, improving the quality of life for everyone who lives and works there.

- Your employees will have an opportunity to learn new skills, work with people from different backgrounds and life experiences, and explore unused talents. In being stimulated to stretch themselves, they are likely to "give back" to the company. Moreover, they will develop useful ties to other activities and co-workers within the company, enhancing overall company morale.

* * * *

The Business Council for Effective Literacy is a publicly-supported foundation established to foster greater corporate awareness of adult functional illiteracy and to help increase business involvement in the literacy field. BCEL officers and staff interact with literacy programs and planners around the country--continually assessing their activities, needs, and problems--so as to provide responsible advice to the business community on the opportunities for their involvement and funding. BCEL's work is carried out largely through a varied publications and technical assistance program.

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